(b) Does not arise.

(c) and (d) The North Eastern Region shares 98% of its border with international border i.e. Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and Bhutan. India has entered into border trade agreement with Myanmar and w.e.f. April 12, 1995 Indo-Myanmar border has been officially declared open for trade. There is no formal border trade agreement with Bangladesh. Both countries have agreed to constitute Committee of Experts to examine this proposal.

Under SAPTA, India and Bangladesh exchange tariff concessions to promote formal trade between the two countries. Two rounds of negotiations have already taken place and both the countries have agreed to give tariff concessions in some of the items.

The border trade with China is presently being conducted only through two points each in Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

The Study "Industrial Development and Export Potential of the North-Eastern Region" done by IIFT has suggested a number of steps including strengthening of infrastructure facilities, setting up of market complex near Myanmar border, utilisation of alternative routes etc.

Following steps have been taken by Government of India to promote border trade in the NER:—

(i) An Inter-Ministerial Task Force under the Ministry of Commerce has been set up to review the entire North-East border and inter-country trade issue and to report on trade opportunities and manufacturing potential for export in the North East.

(ii) Under the Critical Infrastructure Balance Scheme (CIBS) which envisages balancing capital investment for relieving bottlenecks in export infrastructure, two projects in Meghalaya and one in Mizoram with total contribution of Rs. 5.08 crores by Government of India.

(iii) ESCAP has set up an expert group from Ministry of Railways to examine the viability of various alternative routes through North-Eastern Sector. An Interim Report has already been submitted on this.

(iv) A study on "Export potential Assessment of Horticulture and Floriculture projects for the North-Eastern State" was conducted by Tata Consultancy Services on behalf of Agricultural and Processed Food products Export Development Authority (APEDA). The draft report is under examination.

Export to South East Asian Countries

3556. DR.D. MASTHAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that 38% of our exports go to South East Asian countries;

(b) what are the major items of export to these countries;

(c) whether export to Japan has suffered recently;

(d) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(e) what steps are being taken to export more agricultural products?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEDGE): (a) India's exports to the South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which comprises of Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Myanmar & Lao PDR, during the year 1997-98 amounted to US $ 2399.46 million which was about 7.1% of India's global exports during the year.

(b) The major items of exports to these countries are oil meals, gems & jewelleary, machinery and instruments,

primary and semi finished iron & steel, cotton yarn, fabric and made-ups, meat and meat preparations, marine products, drugs, pharaceuticals & fine chemicals, manufacture of metal and electronic goods.

(c) India's export to Japan has declined from US $ 2006 million in 1996-97to US $ 1859 million during 1997-98.

(d) Reduced global imports by Japan due to recession in the Japanese economy and diversification of their sources of import have contributed to the decline in our exports to Japan.

(e) Some of the steps taken to enhance exports of agricultural products, *inter alia*, include providing assistance for raising small and large nurseries for production of good quality plantation material; provision of soft loans for setting up of grading/processing centers; financial assistance to exporters/growers/ cooperative societies for development of infrastructural facilities; providing financial assistance for improved pakaging and strengthening of quality control; setting up of integrated cargo handling and cold storage facilities at various international airports for handling export of perishable items; abolition of cess on export of pepper, (except green pepper in brine) cardamom, saffron and spice oils and oleoresins to make them price competitive in overseas markets; providing assistance for process upgradation and product development; arranging buyer-seller meets and participation in international trade fairs.

Export Promotion Schemes to counter Impact of Economic Sanctions

3557. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the export promotion schemes announced to counter the impact of economic sanctions by developed countries; and

(b) the steps proposed to bring in foreign investment into export infrastructure?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) Since it appears that economic sanctions imposed in the wake of our recent nuclear tests have had no significant trade impact, no new export promotion schemes, spesifically aimed at countering the impact of economic sanctions, have been considered necessary.

Employment on compassionate grounds in BHEL

3558. DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the guidelines laid down for giving employment on compassionate grounds to the next of kin of the deceased employees of the Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd.;

(b) the details of cases where such employment has been given during the last five years;

(c) the details of requests for similar employment pending with the BHEL, region-wise; and

(d) the likely time frame fixed for their disposal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY (SHRI SUKHBIR SINGH BADAL): (a) The criteria being followed for considering employment on compassionate grounds are economic condition of the family, number and age of dependents, cause/ nature of demise of the employee, length of service rendered by the deceased employee as well as age, qualifications and background of the applicant vis-a-vis vacancy position, However, employment on compassionate ground is subject to organisational requirements.

(b) Approximately 208 cases in different units of BHEL.